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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of recent development in the teaching and study of the uncommonly taught languages and attempts to provide a rationale for a continuing interest in the field. General trends are noted and important recent publications are mentioned. The types of pedagogical materials being developed and their relative value is also discussed. In general the author notes a general lessening of interest in the uncommonly taught languages; reasons for this decline in interest are discussed and arguments in favor of continued support of programs in the field are presented; the important role of uncommonly taught languages in area studies is especially stressed. In conclusion, the author discusses eight areas of concern to the study of uncommonly taught languages in which further work is needed. For commentary on the views expressed in this paper see related document AL 002 525, "Response to W. Gage's Article 'Uncommonly Taught Languages'" by Carleton T. Hodge. (FWB)

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UNCOMMONLY TAUGHT LANGUAGES

by

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II. Reports

A. Uncommonly Taught Languages

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Any year's publications related to the uncommonly taught languages reflect the more or less accidental surfacing of activity which has been going on for some time. This situation obtains both for basic descriptive studies and for works directed to the teacher or learner of a language.

Over a period of five years an increase in both breadth and depth of coverage can be discerned. Substantial studies of one language or another appear from time to time, mostly as academic dissertations. The efforts of missionary linguists, particularly those affiliated with the Summer Institute of Linguistics, constantly expand the number of languages for which reliable descriptive material is available. Interest in teaching the less commonly taught languages has expanded to the point where some useful pedagogical tools exist or are being developed for nearly every national language in the world. In some instances, principally as a by-product of missionary activities, manuals have appeared for the study of the languages of even quite small groups of speakers. Accumulation of course-writing efforts has reached the point where the teacher of Indonesian, Thai, Korean, Tagalog, or Amharic can have a certain selection of instructional resources to draw upon, in the way that had previously been the case only for the teacher of Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, Arabic, Hindi, or some

few of the less usual European languages.

Beyond the general observation that workers in this field have kept plugging away during recent years, a few specific trends may be noted.

One is the development in the countries where these languages are spoken of materials for teaching them to speakers of other languages. Such texts now often far outclass the traditional visitors-phrase-book approach. It is still true that most of the serious works dealing with Asian and African languages are produced in the United States, the U.S.S.R., England and France, but the increase in linguistic expertise available in many countries now gives promise that purely local projects, or local endeavors in cooperation with outside scholars, will produce - with an apprehension of the local situation that is not otherwise obtainable - a far larger share of the research.

A new direction of investigation has developed in the United States with regard to American Indian languages. Previously, scientific documentation of these tongues virtually exhausted the attention paid to them. There has been recently, however, a growth in research interests related to the use of native American languages in local community-development programs;[1] concurrently, investigations focusing on the teaching of English to speakers of American Indian languages have begun to appear.[2]

In the preparation of pedagogical materials there has been a start at considering how whatever is developed for a given language-teaching program may be generalized to other situations.[3] As yet, this is a cloud no bigger than a man's hand on the horizon, but it may indicate an incipient tendency for the teaching of the uncommonly taught languages to develop into a single

coherent field, in contrast to the present rather chaotic fragmentation into at least as many fields as languages taught.

Although general trends affecting research in the uncommonly taught languages are hard to put one's finger on, certain events of the year just past can be singled out as important.

The most noteworthy enterprise was the inauguration of the Language and Area Studies Review by the Social Science Research Council in cooperation with the six major area professional associations in the United States: the Association for Asian Studies, the African Studies Association, the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, the American Oriental Society, the Latin American Studies Association, and the Middle East Studies Association. This is to be a general assessment of the status and impact of all non-western studies in the United States including the relation of the uncommonly taught languages to area studies.

Three publications appeared in 1969 that are particularly helpful in determining the present state of affairs for the less usual languages. A Provisional Survey of Materials for the Study of Neglected Languages by Birgit A. Blass et al. provides the most adequate basis yet for assessing the resources in print for teaching these languages. University Resources in the United States and Canada for the Study of Linguistics: 1969-1970 by Grognet and Brown includes a listing of uncommonly taught languages offered at universities with linguistic programs. "Foreign Language Registrations in Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 1968" by Julia G. Kant in the December 1969 Foreign Language Annals lists all the enrollments reported as of the semester of the survey.[4]

The Center for Applied Linguistics, as part of its tenth anniversary program, held two conferences concerned with important facets of research in the uncommonly taught languages. The Conference on English Bilingual Dictionaries, meeting early in September, considered the state of lexicographic studies. The program of obtaining basic information about the structure and status of little-known languages concerned the Conference on Languages of the World, which was in the planning stage in 1969 but did not actually convene until April 1970.

II.

Recent efforts in the United States have assembled a solid body of valuable information about the uncommonly taught languages and have made available a gratifying number of useful tools of access for studying them. Nevertheless, anyone who looks at these activities in broad perspective can scarcely escape being appalled by the disarray. There is a generally haphazard approach to deciding what projects will be undertaken next, which stems principally, it would seem, from the fact that a concern for these languages is in almost all circumstances subordinate to something else. No generally recognized source of guidance exists that could indicate needs and priorities and help to rationalize the allocation of what are, after all, rather scarce resources of potentially available personnel and funds. This situation may well be the ineradicable result of the interplay of myriad particular interests, with very few people knowledgeable except over a narrow portion of the whole spectrum of activities involved. Yet

at least as an ideal, one would like to think that, without stifling individual initiative, a coherent direction of development could be fostered in this domain. Logically, the organization of channels in the United States to accomplish this should become a responsibility of the newly formed Council of Executive Secretaries of Area Association (which originated to facilitate the previously mentioned Language and Area Studies Review), but such a venture is hardly likely to become central to their interests.

Current portents indicate a general lessening of interest in the uncommonly taught languages.

A general preoccupation with internal problems of the United States militates against extensive support for any activity which has relevance primarily on an international level and which is concerned mostly with the more remote areas of the world at that. The stress being placed on the teaching of English around the globe may also encourage a certain complacency about the necessity for the cultivation of exotic language studies at home. There is also some tendency to an unsupported belief that the National Defense Education Act and the Peace Corps have already dealt with the needs for materials to teach these languages, whereas actually such needs have often been filled only at a very rudimentary level.

In academic circles, too, there is evidence of a decline in enthusiasm for expeditions along the less well-charted linguistic frontiers. Support seems to be dwindling for de Saussure's assignment as the first objective of linguistics: "a) to describe... all observable languages."

Efforts to strengthen the position of the uncommonly taught languages have, more often than not, become dispersed and diluted as time goes on

Possibly this may have been all for the best, but numerous decisions affecting basic policy seems to have been arrived at largely by inattention rather than by a considered reversal of orientation. There are certain questions which, I would argue, need to be faced squarely if work in this area is to proceed with much of any definition of purpose.

Are science, mathematics, and foreign language teaching particularly crucial areas in American education? That they were, was the conclusion reached in the hearings of the Eighty-Fifth Congress in the period of post-Sputnik-I soul-searching. The National Defense Education Act has continued this emphasis, which, naturally, seems like only a first step in the right direction to many who benefit by it and like one-sidedness and special privilege to those who do not.

Is language study the keystone for area studies? The National Defense Education Act, setting up Language and Area Centers, referred to "modern foreign languages and the geographical areas where those languages are spoken." The counter-pressure in some academic circles has been towards thinking in terms of areas and the languages spoken in them, so that language study fulfills only ancillary role.

Are Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Hindi-Urdu, Arabic, and Portuguese still the critical uncommonly taught languages for the United States? The first assessment made by the Office of Education, under the National Defense Education Act, gave a clear priority to these languages. Subsequently, a much broader view has been taken in allocating both scholarships and research money. Some doubt is now expressed as to whether that first five deserve special stress any longer. Enrollments in Mandarin, Japanese, and Portuguese

do stand - with modern Hebrew - well ahead of other neglected languages, and Norwegian, Swedish, and Arabic form a second group in the reported 1968 higher-education registrations. Only Hindi and Urdu fall behind the relative position the assessment of criticality would indicate for them. It seems dubious, however, that the study of the critical languages is as yet broadly based enough to make up the U.S. deficit of people able to operate in them relative to anticipated needs.

Affirmative answers to all three of the questions just posed need to play a part in educational planning if there is not to be a drift towards holding that all education is equal, all area subjects are equal, all languages are equal, and research and development efforts in the uncommonly taught languages are as good a spare-time activity as any other.

III.

Research in the less widely taught languages means either attempting scientific description of languages or constructing pedagogical materials.

Language description is part of linguistics. This is hardly the place to delineate substantive topics within descriptive linguistics; from another point of view, more relevant to the present discussion, each language is a separate topic.

A fundamental classification of pedagogical materials was instituted by the U.S. Office of Education at an early stage of operation under the National Defense Education Act. Basic tools of access are accordingly grouped as basic courses, tapes, readers, dictionaries, and student reference

grammars; advanced materials may be readily assimilated to this division.

Treatments of a language for a less specialized audience also seem important for the uncommonly taught languages. An approach independent of the pedagogical process, and in a less concentrated form than is usual in a student reference grammar, can be found in the Language Handbook Series of the Center for Applied Linguistics, in which studies of Bengali, Swahili, and Arabic have appeared, and also in The Japanese Language by Roy Andrew Miller (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1967). The University of Chicago press has announced other uncommonly taught languages as future titles in the series initiated by The Japanese Language (History and Structure of Languages); there also will presumably fulfill the same function.

Recently, considerable interest has been expressed in providing students with a condensed description of the grammar of a language. Such a compact overview can serve as a ready reference, and may be used as a sort of a road map to orient the more sophisticated learner to what to expect in his studies. A treatment of this scope may conveniently be designated a "Student's Structural Synopsis."[5]

It would be hard not to give basic courses pride of place among these conventional categories in any ranking. Where none exist the teaching task is formidable indeed. Dictionaries certainly fall only a short way behind. (In fact, when no usable dictionaries exist it is next to impossible to write reasonably good basic introductory texts, although linguistically trained course developers can utilize lexicographic sources that are utterly impenetrable to the student.)

Since even reference grammars directed to the learner are usually forbidding to the uninitiated, and since the production of one is such a formidable undertaking, it seems likely that language handbooks are more crucial than reference grammars, at least for languages of major social significance, and that student's structural synopses should be written ahead of full student reference grammars for most languages. Readers rate last, not because reading is unimportant - it is, on the contrary, likely to be the main use made of an uncommonly taught language by most American academic learners of one - but because readers are, by and large, to only a slight extent pedagogical. Many readers for neglected languages do nothing more than conveniently put some allegedly appropriate reading selections inside one cover. The book that really guides a student towards becoming a reader of a language is a rare phenomenon indeed.

IV.

A. If the United States is to take a serious interest in the cultures of most of the rest of the world, the key long-term requirement for supporting that interest is the training of specialists in the major languages of areas outside Western Europe. It has long been the contention of many observers in this field that a crucial factor in the development of expertise - and committed interest - in language specialists and area specialists is study at a fairly early period in their careers in the milieu where a language is used. (Each of the reports on the State of the Art in four of the more commonly taught uncommonly taught languages published by the ERIC

Clearinghouse for Linguistics in 1968 mentions the importance of language study in situ.)[6] The promotion of overseas advanced training for language specialists is the salient development project needed for the uncommonly taught languages. Existing programs should be strengthened, and considerable attention given to how they may best meet the needs of American students. The institution of new programs is required for some languages.

The total outlay for a fully functioning system that kept up with the needs of the English speaking world would be considerable; it is worth stopping to point out, however, that a large portion of such activities could be carried on using only blocked currency. It seems extremely likely, furthermore, that the government of India, for example, would welcome the use of funds under PL 480 to support study of languages of India, and Indian culture, in programs operating in India. India and Pakistan are both "surplus" countries for PL 480 funds, so that this source could conceivably largely fund the advanced study in the regions where they are used not only of Hindi and Urdu, but also of Bengali and other Indo-Aryan languages of secondary importance and of Tamil and other Dravidian languages. Tunisia and the United Arab Republic are also "surplus" countries, where blocked funds might largely finance the study of Arabic. The advanced study of Portuguese could also be undertaken from the "Near surplus" funds in Brazil if the U.S. and Brazilian governments agreed on the importance of such activities.

In another "near surplus" country, Indonesia, the same could be done for Indonesian, with further provision for the smaller amount of appropriate attention to Javanese and other languages of the country. Three additional

Arabic-speaking countries are in the "near surplus" category: Morocco, Syria, and the Republic of the Sudan. Programs for Turkish, one of the languages of medium importance, could take advantage of the equivalent financial situation in Turkey. The two major neglected languages, Mandarin Chinese and Japanese would, of course, have to depend entirely on other sources of funding to train advanced students in Taiwan, Hong Kong or Singapore, and in Japan. If these two could be accommodated, and PL 480 funds fully utilized, the remaining languages most needing provisions for training abroad would seem to be Persian, Korean, and Swahili. Of these only Swahili could be thought of as presenting a pressing problem. (Unfortunately, even as a dream, the use of surplus funds in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for a Swahili program seems unreasonable, both because of difficulties in the political situation, and because of the considerable differences between the type of Swahili normally used in the Congo and the standard variety of the east coast of Africa.)

B. Next in importance to making language training deeper for the specialist comes making it more broadly available for those who are not specializing in these languages or the areas in which they are spoken. Courses need to be designed for the American research scholar interested either in visiting a foreign country for professional purposes or in making use of source materials in its language. A fair amount of effort has gone into making training in German and Russian available for this more instrumental approach to using a language, but hardly any yet for the less commonly taught languages. For five languages, at least, teaching materials for such users are clearly important; these are Mandarin Chinese (with

written Chinese), Japanese, Arabic, Hindustani-Hindi-Urdu, and Indonesian. Similar provision is probably needed for another five: Persian, Korean, Vietnamese, Polish, and Dutch. Materials would also be quite useful for a third group: Serbo-Croatian, Czech, Hungarian, Swahili, and Modern Hebrew.

C. A special immediate need exists in the United States for Swahili teaching materials for secondary and elementary schools.

D. The development of student's structural synopses is perhaps the most rewarding direction for efforts to supply aids to students of neglected languages in the near future. The principal reason for this is that a considerable benefit for the learners can be expected from a project of rather manageable scope. More substantial undertakings, such as dictionaries and reference grammars, have a greater long-range impact on the state of instruction in a language, but at the cost of a great investment in labor before the results are available. Furthermore, in spite of the great need for dictionaries, it is at least questionable that the benefit to students per man year invested in preparing one is as great as that obtainable from structural synopses.

E. The need for information about a language on the part of those not actually studying it gives a high priority to the funding of more works of the type previously designated as a language handbook.

F. The application of advanced technology to the teaching of some of the more important languages of Asia, especially ones not using a Roman alphabet, is an important field of research. The teaching strategies developed in the French Prototype Self-Instructional course produced by the

Center for Applied Linguistics could be applied and extended for developing a major self-instructional component in teaching - for example - Hindi. Such an approach seems likely to be beneficial also for Urdu, Modern Standard Arabic, Japanese, and perhaps eventually for Chinese - obviously only after a much deeper study of the ways of relating the spoken form of the language to the writing system in such a program.

G. In order to serve students wishing to study an uncommonly taught language, but who cannot easily participate in a regular program of instruction, further research and development leading to the extension of independent study is required along the lines of the program currently promoted by the Center for Critical Languages of the State University of New York and the National Council of Associations for International Studies, and described in Boyd-Bowman, 1969.

H. Students, especially those whose interests are more practical than academic, often have a pressing need to be able to learn more of a language in the field in interactions with native speakers. Development of training programs that facilitate this type of continued active learning is highly significant for developing communicative skills of Americans who need to function in an exotic language environment.

FOOTNOTES

1. There has been, for example, a program supported by the Office of Education under the Bilingual Education Act in which a linguist who has been studying the language is cooperating with a program to incorporate Pomo in school programs in a town in northern California.

2. Examples are the studies in Teaching English to Speakers of Chocktaw, Navajo and Papago: A Contrastive Approach, edited by Sirarpi Ohanessian and William W. Gage (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1969).

3. This trend has been particularly advocated by Dr. Earl W. Stevick of the School of Language Studies of the Foreign Service Institute in articles, many of which have as yet been circulated only privately.

4. "Other languages - defined for purposes of this report as all those except the five leading modern languages, Latin, and Greek - accounted for 32,813 registrations in 1968, or about 2.9% of the total college language registration. They were distributed among 105 different languages, ancient and modern. The largest group was registered in Hebrew, taught in 169 colleges; its registrations accounted for more than 30% of the total. Chinese, Japanese, and Portuguese each had more than 4,000 registrations.

"Swahili, now offered in twenty-nine colleges, has the highest growth rate among all the languages covered by the survey: it had 22 registrations in 1960, and 608 in 1968. Yiddish increased from 13 to 109 during the same period; the figures for Hindi tripled; and Portuguese had nearly four times as many registrations in 1968 as in 1960.

"One institution in seven offers instruction in one or more 'other' languiages. The largest number of 'other languages taught by a given institution is thirty-six, at Indiana University and the Los Angeles campus of the University of California. Several universities list registrations in twenty or more of the less widely taught languages. These include the University of California at Berkeley and the University of Washington in the West; the Universities of Chicago, Minnesota, and Wisconsin (Madison) in the Midwest; and Columbia and Harvard in the East.

"The chart below shows the languages that have had registrations of 100 or more in each reporting period since 1960, with total registrations and registration trends.

	Registrations in the Less Widely Taught Languages				Index of Change from 1960 to: (1960=100.0)		
	1960	1963	1965	1968	1963	1965	1968
Arabic	541	835	930	1,100	154.3	171.9	203.3
Chinese	1,844	2,444	3,359	5,061	132.5	182.2	274.5
Czech	120	176	158	182	146.7	131.7	151.7
Dutch	130	172	143	158	132.3	110.0	121.5
Greek (Modern)	139	440	217	146	316.5	156.1	105.0
Hebrew	3,834	5,538	8,093	10,169	144.4	211.1	265.2
Hindi	106	173	145	349	163.2	136.8	329.2
Japanese	1,746	2,813	3,443	4,324	161.1	197.2	247.7
Norwegian	722	942	803	1.103	130.5	111.2	152.8
Polish	539	708	607	656	131.4	112.6	121.1
Portuguese	1,033	2,051	3,034	4,048	198.5	293.7	391.1
Serbo-Croatian	149	131	134	209	87.9	89.9	140.3
Swedish	622	705	682	1,101	113.3	109.6	177.0

(Kant, 1969: pages 249-250.)

5. The introduction to Kirundi Basic Course by Earl W. Stevick Washington, D.C.: Foreign Service Institute, Department of State, 1965) exhibits the approach that such a synopsis might take.

6. For instance: "A time when the students have their most significant exposure to Chinese culture." (Wrenn 1969: page 24.) See also Martin, 1969; pages 9-10, Kelley, 1969: pages 7-9, especially (8): "The American Institute of Indian Studies, in addition, is currently proposing to set up facilities in Delhi to provide a year-long intermediate course in Hindi, during which the student would have an opportunity to scout the local area in which he plans to work and to acquire the variety of skills most relevant to his own field of interest. If this proposal is implemented, it will go a long way toward relieving some of the most pressing needs of students beyond the elementary level."

Abboud, 1969: page 19 says "some of our most promising students, from among whom we hope to draw our scholars and language teachers in the future, should be guided in their foreign language experience in the area by nothing less than first-rate teachers."

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